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Civil Rights Urges Public Hearing On Secretary of State Voting Changes

Lansing, MI – This week the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) formally requested that the Secretary of State (SOS) be made to hold hearings or otherwise allow for public comment regarding the proposed rule changes in voting requirements.

“Potential changes to the voting processes must be given the full public scrutiny they deserve,” said MDCR Director Linda V. Parker. “Beyond that, the law does not allow for changes to voting processes without public debate.”

According to Section 5 of the federal Voting Rights Act, these voting changes must be submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice for pre-clearance. However, pre-clearance cannot be granted until the rules defining the changes have been properly adopted by the changing agency. In Michigan, such rule changes are governed by the Michigan Administrative Procedures Act, which among other things requires that the public has an opportunity to review and comment BEFORE the rules are adopted.

MDCR submitted this request to the Department of Justice upon learning that requests for pre-clearance were filed.

“The Secretary of State has requested pre-clearance of the rules implementing the photo ID statute but the rules have not been made available to the public for review,” added Director Parker. “The SOS has also asked Justice to pre-clear the closing of the Buena Vista branch office over local objections that the office is necessary to obtain the only acceptable ID needed to vote.”

“This is not an objection to the proposed rule changes, or a request that the Department of Justice deny pre-clearance,” concluded Parker. “We just want to make sure that the public is afforded the legal right to participate in these public processes before changes are made.”

For more information on the Department of Civil Rights visit <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcr>.

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